

## *Schooling for Life*

MARTIN LUTHER EDUCATOR

Rarely has the picture of Martin Luther in his dual role as educator at home and at school, as parent and professor, been treated extensively in English.<sup>1</sup> Yet home and academic robe were daily fare for most of his life. From October 22, 1512, when the Wittenberg faculty formally received the twenty-eight year old monk as Lecturer on the Bible, through his marriage to Catherine von Bora in June, 1525, at age forty-two, until his death twenty-one years later, Luther's daily routine normally shuttled between duties at home and at school. If we want to know the man as he is, we have knocked at the right door.

Those who expect to come away from the visit with a notebook full of abstract parental and educational principles will be sadly disappointed. We would be unfaithful to the Great Reformer's own mode and manner, were we to regale you with high-sounding theories of education abstracted and distilled from Luther's experience at home and in the classroom. To get to know Luther's views on education, we must become acquainted with him personally, as a father and as a teacher. Our approach, therefore, will happily be descriptive rather than prescriptive; hopefully, it will be edifying as well as instructive.

In its own way it is strange that the English-speaking world has not readily acknowledged Luther's place in the history of education. Columbia University, a leading teacher-training institution in our land, inscribed in stone a list of modern educators on one of its buildings. We find Melancthon immortalized there. But one looks in vain for Luther's name.

Despite prevailing attitudes, tributes to Luther and his efforts in the field of education at home and school are not lacking. Perhaps a bit of German chauvinism moved Dr. Schmidt, in a four volume *History of Pedagogy*, to applaud Luther as "one of the greatest educators and school masters."<sup>2</sup> The reason he gives for such a tribute are echoed almost point by point in Painter's volume, *Luther on Education*. He records Luther's impact on education by stating:

We realize that the great Reformer accomplished scarce less for education than for religion. Through his influence which was fundamental, wide-reaching and beneficent, there began for the one as for the other a new era of advancement. Let us note a few particulars:

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<sup>1</sup> The *Bibliography of the Continental Reformation* (Connecticut: The Shoe String Press, 1972) contains an exhaustive list of Reformation materials available in English, and lists under Education only three books, besides works on the Catechism of Luther. These three are: Gustav Bruce, *Luther as an Educator* (Minneapolis, 1928); P. E. Kretzmann, *Luther on Education in the Christian Home and School* (Burlington, 1940); Franklin Painter, *Luther on Education* (Philadelphia, 1889). Dr. Luther's two basic writings on education are: *To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools - 1527* (LW 45, 341-378; WA 15, 9-53); *Sermon on Keeping Children in School - 1530* (LW 46, 209-258; WA 30 II, 517-588), based on Matthew 19:14.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Schmidt, *Geschichte der Pädagogik: dargestellt in weltgeschichtlicher Entwicklung und im organischen Zusammenhange mit dem Culturleben der Völker*. Vol. 3: Nach Christus die Weltepoche der humanen Erziehung, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Vol. 3: vielfach verm. und verb. Aufl. (Cöthen [Germany]: P. Schettler, 1873-[1883]. *History of Pedagogy: presented in its world-historical development and in organic context with the cultural life of the nations*. Volume 3: A.D., World epochs of humanistic education, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (frequently published and distributed. (Cöthen [Germany]: P. Schettler, 1873-[1883]).

1. In his writings he laid the foundation of an educational system which begins with the popular school and ends with the university.
2. He exhibited the necessity of schools both for the Church and the State, and emphasized the dignity and worth of the teacher's vocation.
3. He set up as the noble ideal of education a Christian man, fitted through instruction and discipline to discharge the duties of every relation of life.
4. He impressed on parents, ministers, and civil officers their obligation to educate the young.
5. He brought about a reorganization of schools, introducing graded instruction, an improved course of study and rational methods.
6. In his appreciation of nature and child-life, he laid the foundation for education science.
7. He made great improvements in method; he sought to adapt instruction to the capacity of children, to make learning pleasant, to awaken mind through skillful questioning, to study things as well as words, and to temper discipline with love.
8. He advocated compulsory education on the part of the State.<sup>3</sup>

Was this splendid evaluation warranted? "To prove this," we say with Thomas Jefferson, "let facts be submitted to a candid world."<sup>4</sup> Indebted to Painter for that summary perspective, we turn now to that warm nest, where learning and loving, listening and laboring first begin — the home.

### 1. Luther, as Educator at Home

For Martin Luther, the home was the foundation of all instruction as it was the primary training ground for Christian character. By the Fourth Commandment God established the place of the home to be the keystone of the social order. Parents should never abdicate their primary responsibility either to schools, to the church, or to the government. Luther realized, as every teacher knows, that where the home does not co-operate with the school, the efforts can often be undone. He warned parents about neglecting their prime duty to train those in the household. "*If you parents and lords do not help, we shall accomplish nothing with our preaching. ... Every parent is a bishop in his own house.*"<sup>5</sup>

So important was the position of parent in Luther's eyes that the breakdown of the home results in tragic consequences for the child, for the parent, and for the nation generally. In the long run degeneration sets in. What children learn at home they carry throughout their lives. "*Where father and mother rule their families poorly,*" Luther observed, "*permitting their children to have their own way, there no city, market, village, land, principality, kingdom, or empire are ruled well. For a son becomes a father, judge, mayor, prince, king, emperor, school teacher etc.*" "God gave you children," he said, echoing St. Paul, "*So you would bring them up to the best of their ability.*" (Ephesians 6:1-4)<sup>6</sup>

When parents neglect to perform their parental duties, the sins of the parents do not only come down on the children, but also on the parents themselves. In a wedding sermon, Luther instructed the couple:

*"Parents can perform no more damaging bit of work than to neglect their offspring, to let them curse, swear, learn indecent words and songs, and permit them to live as they please. ... They are*

<sup>3</sup> Franklin V.N. Painter, *Luther on Education* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1889, no copyright) 166-168.

<sup>4</sup> From the *Declaration of Independence*: Jefferson's case for the American colonies' separation from England.

<sup>5</sup> WA 30, I, 57ff. *Sermon*, November 11, 1528.

<sup>6</sup> WA 29, 471ff. *Sermon*, on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity, July 11, 1529.

*constantly concerned to provide sufficiently for the body rather than for the soul. ...Therefore it is highly necessary that every married person regard the soul of his child with greater care and concern than the flesh which has come from him, that he consider the child nothing less than a precious, eternal treasure, entrusted to his protection by God so that the devil, the world and the flesh do not steal and destroy it. For the child will be required from the parent on Judgment Day in a very strict reckoning."*<sup>7</sup>

From such seriousness we might conclude that Luther was a stern and rigorous parent. What a dreary home that must have made! Nothing could be further from the truth. Where God's Word is rightfully applied there is joy and laughter in the midst of life's frailties. The Luther home was full of life and love. It became, as is well attested in history, a model for Christian homes.<sup>8</sup>

Luther was fond of children. He admired their simplicity and trustfulness. Even though he wed later in life, his twenty-one years of marriage were blessed with six children. The oldest, John (June 7, 1526), better known as Hans, was named after his grandfather. On the occasion of his birth Luther opened his heart in a letter to his friend Spalatin. "*I am a happy husband, and may God continue to send me happiness, for from the most precious woman, my best of wives, I have received, by the blessing of God, a little son, John Luther, and, by God's wonderful grace, I have become a father.*"<sup>9</sup> He watched the boy grow with a father's eye and an educational interest. Of the seven-month old Hans, he wrote: "*My little Hans sends greetings. He is in his teething month and is beginning to say 'Daddy,' and scolds everybody with pleasant insults.*"<sup>10</sup>

But the affectionate father suffered intensely when Elizabeth (December 10, 1527), born a year after Hans, died as a baby. "*My little daughter Elizabeth is dead,*" he wrote to a friend. "*She has left me strangely sick at heart. ...I would never have believed that a father's heart could be so tender for his child. Pray to God for me.*"<sup>11</sup> The sorrow eased with the birth of another daughter, Magdalena (May 4, 1529). A beautiful girl with a sweet disposition, she was named after Aunt Lena, who lived in the Luther household. The father seemed to dote on her, his little Lenchen.

Another son was born on November 7, 1531, and named after his father, since their birthdays almost matched. "*The youngest children are always the most loved by the parents,*" Luther commented introspectively. "*My little Martin is my dearest treasure. Hans and Lena can now speak and do not need so much care, therefore it is that parents always love the little infants who need their love the most. What a heart-stab it must have been to Abraham when he was commanded to kill his only son. Truly I would dispute with God if he asked me do such a thing.*"<sup>12</sup>

On January 28, 1533, the Luthers received a third son. At the christening the next day, the proud parent said to the sponsors, "*I have called him Paul, for St. Paul has given me many good sayings*

<sup>7</sup> WA 2, 170. *Postile on the Marriage Estate*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany - 1519. Also in Walch<sup>2</sup> 10, 643f. The Walch<sup>2</sup> Edition, based on the original Walch Edition in Germany but revised and printed in the United States, is, at times, referenced as the St. Louis Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Article by Richard Friedenthal, "*Das Evangelische Pfarrhaus im Deutschen Kulturleben,*" printed in the magazine *Luther*, produced by the Luthergesellschaft, 1971, I, 1-15.

<sup>9</sup> WABr 4:89. *Letter to Spalatin* - June 17, 1526. Preserved Smith and Charles M. Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence and Other Contemporary Letters* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, ca. 1913-1918). Volume II, 373f. Hereafter cited as: Smith/Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence*.

<sup>10</sup> Smith/Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence* II, 391.

<sup>11</sup> LW 49, 203. *Letter to Nicholas Hausmann* - August 5, 1528. See also Preserved Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., Reprint 1968) 351. Hereafter cited as: Smith, *Letters*.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 352.

*and arguments, wherefore I wish to honor him."*<sup>13</sup> The last child, Margaret (December 17, 1534), named after Luther's recently deceased mother, was the only of the three daughters to reach maturity.

Even the unfortunate happenings of parenthood did not dampen Luther's love. One day when the baby, after the manner of children, dirtied papa's lap, he good-naturedly explained that the child's performance was no different from the way we treat our heavenly Father. God cares and provides for us and we repay him with the filth of sin and ingratitude. On another occasion when his child was screaming at the top of his voice because it could not have its way, Luther mused, "*What cause have you given me to love you so? How have you deserved to be my heir? By making yourself a general nuisance! And why aren't you thankful instead of filling the house with your howls?*"<sup>14</sup>

But Luther recognized that children need discipline because of their sinful nature. In the Christian home, respect for parents and love for parents go hand in hand. He could vividly recall the severe punishment he had received as a youth for stealing a nut and was made timid because of it. For this reason he emphasized the pedagogical guideline that "*the apple ought to lie next to the rod for it is bad if children and pupils lose their friendly disposition toward parents and teachers.*"<sup>15</sup>

On one occasion, son Hans disturbed Luther's concentration in studying by his singing. For this the boy was reprimanded and stopped out of respect for his father. The memory came back to Luther, as he was working on the second Psalm: "Serve the Lord with fear and trembling" (Psalm 2:11). "*They go together — joy and fear,*" he commented. "*My little son Hans can do it before me, but I cannot do it before God. If I sit and write and Hans sings a song over there and plays too noisily, I speak to him about it and he sings more quietly with care and respect. So God will always have us joyful, but with fear and honor to him.*"<sup>16</sup>

Luther was not always so firm and gentle. Once Hans angered his father to such an extent that Luther refused to forgive the boy for three days despite Katie's pleas. On this occasion he made the remark, "*I would rather have a dead son than a disobedient one.*"<sup>17</sup> The parental concern came from the heart of a loving father who knew the meaning of the Scripture: "*Anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me* (Matthew 10: 37 NIV)."

But Luther came down hard on any form of child-beating that gave vent to parents' anger and merely satisfied their feelings. Commenting on Paul's words: 'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger' (Colossians 3: 21), he said, "*This is spoken against those who use passionate violence in bringing up their children. Such discipline begets in the child's mind, which is yet tender, a state of fear and reticence, and develops a feeling of hate towards the parents, so that it often runs away from home. ...Yet St. Paul does not mean that we should not punish children, but that we should punish them from love, seeking not to cool our anger, but to make them better.*"<sup>18</sup>

Therefore the parental rule over children should not be "*stubborn and harsh. ...One who disciplines with anger makes evil worse. ...Experience teaches that love will affect more than slavish fear or force. ...Parents commonly are guilty of ruining their children. They usually make a mistake*

<sup>13</sup> LW 54, 184 # 2946a. WATR 3, # 2946A.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 353.

<sup>15</sup> LW 54, 234-235, # 3566A -1537.

<sup>16</sup> LW 54, 21, # 148. Smith, *Letters*, 337.

<sup>17</sup> WATR 5, # 6102.

<sup>18</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education*, 123-124.

*in two directions, either by excessive coddling and indulgence, or through excessive severity and animosity.*"<sup>19</sup>

Yet despite their sinfulness, children were examples to him and the greatest blessings of God. To his fellow Professor Jonas who was rejoicing in God's blessings of fruit by hanging a cherry branch over his table, Luther suggested, "*Why don't you think of your children? They are in front of you all the time and you will learn from them more than from a cherry bough.*"<sup>20</sup>

In many ways father Luther had more trouble training his extended family of nephews and nieces than his own children. No fewer than eleven of his orphaned relatives' children lived in the Black Cloister from time to time. With this background, we can begin to understand Luther's emphasis on the importance of the home in education. In his famous educational treatise, the *Sermon on Keeping Children in School*, he spent pages spelling out parental duties to their children.<sup>21</sup> He himself set the example by producing the Catechism's lessons in Christian living.

As the headlines in the *Small Catechism* indicate, the handbook was not intended, first of all, for pastors to use but for parents. The questions and answers were given "*in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach them to his household.*"<sup>22</sup> Luther modeled that tenet for his children. He sat down with them regularly to review the basics of God's Word in this way. "*Though I am a great doctor,*" he frequently repeated, "*I haven't yet progressed beyond the instruction of children in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. I still learn and pray these every day with my Hans and my little Lena.*"<sup>23</sup>

That is why he prepared for quick publication early in January, 1529, a picture catechism in the form of charts illustrating Bible stories to be hung on the wall. The first edition sold out in less than a month. By June of that year a third and "enlarged and revised edition" appeared. The title of this work was simply *Enchiridion* or "Handbook" for use at home and in church.

The book in small form (*octavo*) contained a handy collection of study materials for continuing education in the evangelical congregations. It included twenty illustrations, a preface by Luther, the Five Chief Parts (Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, Lord's Supper) with explanations, Morning and Evening Prayers, a Table of Duties, a Marriage Booklet, a Baptism Booklet, a Short Form for Confession, the German litany with music, and three collects.

In the Catechism's final form, two important additions were affixed: the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and its explanation, and the section *On Confession*, making clear the nature of confession and giving a form for private confession before receiving the Lord's Supper. After Luther's death, the *Office of the Keys* was added and the *Christian Questions for Those Who Wish to Take the Lord's Supper*.

The Catechism demonstrates Luther's educational concern and skill for presenting difficult theological material in a simple, direct way. He made special effort to make it a handbook for the home. Much of the enduring success of the Catechism can be explained by his use of down-to-earth

<sup>19</sup> Walch<sup>2</sup>, 9, 1543f. *Exposition of 1 John 2, 13-14*.

<sup>20</sup> WATR 3, # 3613.

<sup>21</sup> LW 46, 209-258; WA 30 II, 517-588. *Sermon on Keeping Children in School* - 1530, Matthew 19:14.

<sup>22</sup> *Concordia, the Lutheran Confession* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), pages 313, 316. Also: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelischen-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950, 4<sup>th</sup> edition), the standard edition of the Confessional Writings of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, 501.

<sup>23</sup> WATR 1, # 81.

expressions and the rhythm of language. In talking as people talk, Luther hoped to help the parent to act as "bishop in his own house." In this regard Luther himself took the lead.

There was probably no typical day in the Luther household, even as one is hard to find in ours. But were we to reconstruct that representative day, it might have gone something like this. Catherine must have been the first one up; her husband called her the "morning star of Wittenberg."<sup>24</sup> Luther began each day with his private prayers.

There is a splendid account of Luther at prayer mentioned by Veit Dietrich, his companion at the Coburg Castle. "*Once I happened to hear him,*" Dietrich writes, "*Good God! How great a spirit, how great a faith, was in his very words! With such a reverence did he ask, ...as with a Father and a Friend. 'I know,' he said, 'that you are our Father and our God. I am certain therefore, that you are about to destroy the persecutors of your children. If you do not, then our danger is yours too. ...' I, standing afar off, heard him praying with a clear voice. And my mind burned within me with a singular emotion when he spoke in so friendly a manner, so weightily, so reverently, to God.*"<sup>25</sup> Luther was accustomed to pray aloud at an open window and to talk with the same ease and openness that he did to his colleague Phillip Melanchthon.

After prayer, the father joined the family for devotion. In the popular booklet to his barber, Peter Beskendorf, entitled *A Simple Way to Pray*, Luther pointed out that fathers are instructed by God to lead the family in prayer. If prayer is neglected, the home becomes a virtual pigsty. In another remark, he explained what he meant. On learning that many people could not repeat the Lord's Prayer on their deathbed, he stated, "*If one is ... so careless ... has concerned himself with nothing else, let him die that way, not as a Christian! The deathbed is no place to begin the learning (Matthew 7:6).*"<sup>26</sup> Thus daily devotion is basic to life-long education.

The Doctor then devoted the morning hours to his vocational duties of lecturing and preaching, the afternoon to studying, writing, preparing for class, and reading. The evening meal was usually served at five o'clock. Before the meal Luther read a portion of the Bible, which was often discussed during the meal. The time was used for relaxation and good conversation. Table companions even recorded his *Table Talk*, thanks to which we are able to glean many insights into his life. The conversations dealt with a wide range of subjects. Preserved Smith writes, "Compared with his human breadth and refreshing un-reserve, how dry ... is the table talk of Melanchthon."<sup>27</sup> Luther's nature blossomed in response to the warm sunshine of domestic life.

Often hours passed before the diners rose from the table. The meal concluded with singing the Latin responses of the church year and old religious songs and hymns. Within this setting Luther added his own compositions. The family learned and sang the songs by heart. In this way singing became engrained in the Lutheran church as part of their schooling for life. By singing, Luther, a man of the people, sought to bring the Christian faith into people's hearts and lives. His enemies even claimed that Luther did more for schooling by his hymns than by his translation of the Bible.

Church festivals especially inspired Luther to write something for the family. He liked to celebrate Christmas with the freshness and spontaneity of a child. The Christmas hymn *From Heaven above to Earth I Come* was undoubtedly composed for the family setting. It is the most

<sup>24</sup> WATR 2, # 2772.

<sup>25</sup> Walch<sup>2</sup> 16, 1763.

<sup>26</sup> WA 34, II, 449. *Sermon* - December 12, 1531.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 358f.

childlike of Luther's hymns and appeals to the child in each of us. Published in 1535, it may well have been written for the previous Christmas when Hans was eight and Lenchen five.

This carol was designed to be enacted as a pageant for children. In front stands a cradle. An adult, perhaps Luther himself with his fine tenor voice, takes the part of the angel and announces: "From heav'n above to earth I come to bear good news to every home." Meanwhile, the children, like shepherds, are waiting not far from the cradle. "These are the tokens you shall mark" is their cue. They take up the song, "Now let us all with gladsome cheer go with the shepherds and draw near." Singing, they approach the crib, and then singly or in unison they take up each stanza that marvels at the Christ-child and invite him into their hearts. At the end, all together— children and adults— join in the closing doxology, "Glory to God in highest heaven!"<sup>28</sup> What childlike faith, what an example of how basic education can pass between children and adults in the home!

Once a year a catechism examination was held in the Luther-household. The younger members recited portions of the Catechism and from the Gospels. Together the family would sing psalms. In Luther's later years when sickness forced him to steer away from public preaching in the town, he prepared sermonettes for the home (*Hauspredigten* or *Postiles*). "If I cannot preach in a church," he said, "I preach in my home, because of the office I hold and for my conscience, simply because as a family father it is my duty to preach to my family."<sup>29</sup> These family meditations were recorded by some listeners and are real gems of Bible education.

At the end of the day, the hours between the close of supper and bedtime were spent in playing with the children, in a game of chess or in singing. Luther loved to play the lute and to sing with the family. To a composer he wrote, "We sing your song as well as we can at table and afterwards. If we make a few mistakes it is not your fault. ...You composers mustn't mind if we do make howlers of your songs."<sup>30</sup>

Having been up since five or six in the morning, Luther made it to bed at nightfall, usually around nine o'clock. He would close the day by offering private prayers, again at the open window if that were possible. The father's day was done; he committed all into the hands of his Heavenly Father. Thus Luther lived with the deep-seated awareness of his responsibility as a Christian parent who must oversee his children in good days as well as cheerless.

No illustration of Luther's life bears out his ability to enter the feelings of a little child better than his charming letter to his four-year old son Hans. He was lodged in Coburg Castle at the time. The year was 1530 when the fate of the Augsburg Confession lay in the balance. He had just received news of his father's death, and he himself was suffering from considerable pain. Yet he wrote tenderly to his son, back in Wittenberg:

*"My dearest son, I am glad to hear that you are doing well at your lessons and praying diligently. ...I know of a most delightful garden where many children play. They wear little coats of gold and pick delicious apples from the trees, pears and cherries, golden and purple plums, while they sing and romp around happily. They also have handsome little ponies with golden reins and silver saddles. I asked the man who owns the garden whose children they were. He answered. 'They are the children who pray gladly, do their lessons, and are good.' Then said I, 'Dear friend, I also have a son called Hänschen Luther. May he not also come into*

<sup>28</sup> *Christian Worship, A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993). Hymn # 38.

<sup>29</sup> WATR 2, #2726B.

<sup>30</sup> WABr 7, 154, *Letter to Matthew Weller at Freiburg* - January 18, 1535. Smith, *Letters*, 348.

*the garden. ...Therefore, my dear little son Hans, study and pray cheerfully, and tell Lippus and Jost to study and pray, too. Then you can all come along to the garden. ... Your dear father."*

<sup>31</sup>

Here was a man who wore his heart on his sleeve, whose faith was so deep and transparent that all around him knew of it.

No wonder this father felt such great sorrow when his fourteen year old daughter Magdalena, who had captured her father's heart, died. "*I love her very much,*" he confessed. And as she lay on her deathbed, he asked, "*Magdalena, my dear little daughter, would you like to stay here with your father, or would you willingly go to your Father yonder?*" "Darling father," she replied, "as God wills." Then he reproached himself for not wanting to let her go. "*I love her very much,*" he repeated. "*If my flesh is so strong, what can my spirit do? God has given no bishop so great a gift in a thousand years as he has given me in her. I am angry with myself that I cannot rejoice in heart and be thankful as I ought.*" He then fell down on his knees and wept bitterly and prayed that God might free her. She fell asleep in her father's arms.

As they laid her in the coffin Luther said: "*Darling Lena, you will rise and shine like a star, yes, like the sun. ...I am happy in spirit, but the flesh is sorrowful and will not be content, the parting grieves me beyond measure. ... I have sent a saint to heaven.*"<sup>32</sup> So beat the heart of a Christian parent who was greatly concerned to provide a home for his family where Christ and the Word of God held foremost place.

### Luther, as Educator in School

The broad home experience helped Luther as a classroom teacher. While lecturing on Ecclesiastes, he could declare, "*A woman handles a child much better with one finger than a man does with both fists.*"<sup>33</sup> Even before his marriage, the young professor, filled with the Gospel insights, began to develop new methods and ways that helped him become an outstanding teacher.

In the full sense of the word, Luther was an educator of the church at large. Many of his efforts in writing, preaching, and lecturing were directed to a wider audience than the university students. Yet, in point of fact, Luther's position was that of Lecturer on the Bible at Wittenberg University. If we were to divide this professorship into the two Biblical disciplines as we do today, we would call him a Professor of Old Testament Exegesis rather than of the New Testament. Out of a thirty-two year career as teacher, he spent only three or four years treating the New Testament. The remaining time was devoted to Old Testament writings. His sermon work was in just the opposite proportion.

According to the University statutes, Luther's teaching load was set at an hour lecture, four days per week, with Wednesday as the free day. Within this schedule the professor exercised much academic freedom. He chose the subject matter to be treated during each course. In most cases he broke fresh ground each term and did not repeat the same course year after year. No attempt was made to cover a major portion of the Bible for every student who graduated. It was not uncommon, therefore, for Luther to break off his lecture series very abruptly, as he did in Genesis. By mid-December he had reached chapter thirty-seven.

<sup>31</sup> LW 49, 323-324. *Letter to John Luther* - June 19, 1530; WABr 5, 377f.

<sup>32</sup> LW 54, 430-433, # 5494, # 5498-5499 passim; WATR 5, # 5494, # 5498-5499.

<sup>33</sup> LW 15, 131.



Suddenly one day he announced to the class, "*Now that the nativity of our Lord is approaching, which should be celebrated with joy in the church, ...if my health permits I shall suspend my lectures on Joseph and we shall speak during these days of the incarnation of the Son of God.*"<sup>34</sup> He took the students into Isaiah 9 for a month and then returned to pick up the train of thought in Genesis again. He did the same thing at Easter time. "*I have decided to treat Isaiah 53 at this time because it has been specially appointed and so that we may meditate on the passion and resurrection of Christ and may give thanks for His unspeakable gift.*"<sup>35</sup>

The lectures themselves were an experience. Spalatin reported how popular Luther's classes were. In 1520 he reported around four hundred students from all over Europe attending them. Students were attracted by Luther's great earnestness and by his certainty in delivering the Bible message. Thomas Blaurer from Constance considered himself fortunate that he came to a place where, in his estimation, one can learn the Christian religion right and where the only man is living who really understands the Bible. Luther's colleague, Melanchthon, was even more lavish in his praise: "One is an interpreter; one, a logician; another, an orator, affluent and beautiful in speech; but Luther is all in all — whatever he writes, whatever he utters, pierces to the soul, fixes itself like arrows in the heart — he is a miracle among men."<sup>36</sup>

Granted the ability of Luther, we should not imagine that his class preparation came without effort. Luther prepared well for his lectures. We have already noted his work and study habits at home. He was a bear for work. Already early in his career, he mentioned to a friend. "*I need a couple of ... secretaries, as I do almost nothing the live-long day but write letters. ...I am convent preacher, a reader at meals, am asked to deliver a sermon daily at the parish church, am district vicar, ... business manager of our fish farm... , lecturer on St. Paul, assistant lecturer on the Psalter. ... You see how idle I am!*"<sup>37</sup>

The results of faithful work showed in the lectures. Luther's classroom presentations were fresh and crisp, no mere regurgitation of dry facts or the views of others. He spoke clearly, concisely, directly, and incisively. Melanchthon confessed that "he was of such high and keen understanding that he alone could, in confused, obscure, and difficult disputes, see quickly what was to be advised and done."<sup>38</sup>

Yet the Doctor did not overawe his listeners. He allowed for divergent opinions on the part of students and others when the issues were not clear. "*This is obscure,*" he said with reference to a passage in Zechariah. "*It has been expounded by others in many different ways, and as a result it has become even more obscure. I allow everyone to have his honor and thank him for his efforts. I shall also present what I understand the meaning to be until somebody else does it better.*"<sup>39</sup>

When Luther entered the lecture hall, he carried with him the text of the Biblical book on which he was speaking together with notes and outlines written on scrapes of paper or on the book margin. Some of these notes are still extant. They reveal how he used the Hebrew and Greek texts and noted the key words on the margin. The notes served as memory pegs from which the professor

<sup>34</sup> WA 40, III, 598. *Exposition of Isaiah 9* - 1543-1544.

<sup>35</sup> WA 40, III, 686. *Exposition of Isaiah 53* - 1544.

<sup>36</sup> Charles P. Krauth, *The Conservative Reformation and Its Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899) 86.

<sup>37</sup> LW 48, 27-28. *Letter to John Lang* - October 26, 1516. WABr 1, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *This is Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948) 301.

<sup>39</sup> WA 23, 579. *Exposition of the Prophet Zechariah* - 1527.

extemporized, elaborated, and applied. He became so personally involved that Melanchthon noted: "His words seemed not merely to pass from his lips but to flow from his heart."<sup>40</sup>

In the sixteenth century world of academe, Luther delivered his lectures in Latin. He spoke rapidly and fluently. In a moment of self-criticism he mentioned, "*These lectures were delivered in an extemporaneous and popular form, spoken rapidly just as the expressions came to my lips, mixed with German, and surely more verbose than I should wish.*"<sup>41</sup> When contemporary comparisons or personal feelings came to mind, he used them on the spot. Mount Hermon was like the Thuringian Forest. On one occasion he flatly claimed that if he had been in Noah's place before the flood, he would have thrown up his hands in despair. At another time he insisted that he would not have been so easily deprived of the promised Rachel.

At times his presentation grew exceedingly colorful. Speaking about the Bible, Luther commented, "*It is one of the greatest wonders that God lowers himself to the extent that he sinks himself into the letters and says, 'There a man has painted me with pen and ink.' Spite the devil! These letters are supposed to give the power to save people ... not because of pen and ink, but because of faith.*"<sup>42</sup>

Such graphic words and seeming levity did not detract from Luther's presentations. It rather enhanced the students respect for him. They got to know him both in and out of the classroom as being genuine, natural, and of great insight and humor. His speech betrayed the workings of his mind. His talks and conversations were full of contrasts, analogies, and illustrations. So "*original sin in a man is like a beard, which, though shaved off today so that a man is very smooth around his mouth, yet grows by tomorrow morning.*"<sup>43</sup> Concerning one's sins and the devil's temptations he maintained that "*we cannot keep the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from making a nest in our hair.*"<sup>44</sup> "*The attention of the common man is aroused by illustrations and examples more readily than by profound disputations,*" he explained. And then he continued, "*He prefers a painted picture to a well written book.*"<sup>45</sup>

Many of Luther's illustrations were drawn from his love of nature. Birds were favorites of his. Noting how birds fly away when we approach them, he was led to comment, "*These birds lack faith. They do not know how glad I am to have them here nor that I would let no harm be done them. Thus do we act toward God, who loves us and who has given his Son for us.*"<sup>46</sup> These same birds were nonetheless objects of God's abundant care. "*No one is able to calculate the wealth God spends feeding the birds,*" he said, "*even the useless ones. I fancy it costs God more than the revenue of the King of France for one year to feed two sparrows. And what about other birds, larger and more rapacious?*"<sup>47</sup>

Melanchthon was often upset by Luther's light-hearted and seemingly unprofessional ways. But even in a serious moment, like St. Paul, Luther was not above punning. When he had to quit

<sup>40</sup> CR 10, 161. Melanchthon. *Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's Work.*

<sup>41</sup> WA 42, 324; WA 43, 633. *Lectures in Genesis* – 1544.

<sup>42</sup> Georg Buchwald (ed), *Predigten D. Martin Luthers* (Gütersloh [Germany], 1925-26), Vol. II, 588.

<sup>43</sup> WATR 1, # 138.

<sup>44</sup> WATR 6, # 7075.

<sup>45</sup> Walch<sup>2</sup> 9, 472f.

<sup>46</sup> WATR 2, # 1637.

<sup>47</sup> WATR 2, # 2123.

working because of a ringing in his ears, he wrote to Melancthon, "*My head is now a mere heading, soon it will be a paragraph and then a bare sentence.*"<sup>48</sup>

Although Luther's teaching style was alive, such animation only served to enhance the serious intent of the subject matter with which he was dealing. Reading the commentaries on Genesis, for example, we are impressed by his thorough treatment and personal concern. Using the story of Lot as reference, we see how Luther treats Lot's plea to the men who rescued him from Sodom [Genesis 19]. He uses the occasion to offer a discourse on prayer, the requirements of a good prayer, and the parts of such a prayer. Since immorality has become a much discussed topic today, an extended sampling of Luther's lecture style from the Sodom story gives us the flavor of his classroom.

*Moses proceeds with a description of a terrible sin. I for my part do not enjoy dealing with this passage ....The men of Sodom ... vent their rage upon the weary men before these men go to bed and they begrudge them their sleep. Is not this extraordinary rudeness and cruelty? But it is more serious...for them to demand the men for their sensual desire. It is the men of the city who do this, ... the foremost citizens, whose obligation it was to protect others and to punish similar crimes in the case of others.*

*Accordingly, this, too, serves to make you realize that there were not ten righteous men in the city. These were the foremost citizens. They had wives. They had children and domestics, and they should have ruled these and accustomed them to discipline and modesty. But what are they themselves perpetrating? What are they attempting to do? And that in public and against innocent guests.*"<sup>49</sup>

Not only did the students note the insights of such lecturing, but the Professor displayed great respect for students. He took personal interest in those he taught. He understood their struggles and did not make them feel inferior. "*Some teachers berate the proud youngsters to make them feel what they are,*" he remarked, "*but I always praise the arguments of the boys, no matter how crude they are. ...Everyone must rise by degrees, for no one can attain to excellence suddenly.*"<sup>50</sup>

Such a sympathetic approach to the student who makes mistakes moved him to instruct fellow students to treat one another the same way. For students can be overly sharp in their criticism of each other. In 1537 he tried to create a good atmosphere for a student presentation by saying, "*We shall dispute without the least trace of pride or arrogance, attacking and finding fault with nobody, overwhelming nobody with jibes, as some do it to another who cannot fashion arguments as quickly as they can.*

*... For we are not unaware of the old proverb, 'One learns by making mistakes.' ... It often happens that those who watch others in these exercises want to appear to be better, but when they are engaged in the same exercise and debate, they see that they, too, are lacking in persuasive proofs. Therefore I wish in conclusion to remind you who are about to dispute that you rise confidently, spiritedly, and cheerfully and speak your piece before us, your teachers, for the sake of God and for the profit of the church, the state, and yourselves.*"<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 253. *Letter to Melancthon* - May 12, 1530. *My head (caput) is now a mere heading (capitulum)*. St. Paul puns on the name Onesimus in Philemon v.11.

<sup>49</sup> LW 3, 352-354.

<sup>50</sup> WATR 4, # 4056.

<sup>51</sup> WA 39, I, 271f. *Preface to Circular Disputation* - June 6, 1537.

"After all," Luther said with patient understanding of student growth, "*nobody becomes a doctor all at once. There is no tree that was not a first a little shrub. It takes time.*" "*If somebody advanced a weak, poor, or inept argument, Dr. Luther did not at once reject it, ... but he took over the argument and often gave it a better turn and shape than had been thought of by the opponent and then asked if this had not been the opponent's real meaning. When the opponent said, 'Yes,' Dr. Luther put the argument into syllogistic form so that everybody marveled at it and had much to learn from it.*"<sup>52</sup>

But not every teacher can be liked by everyone. The Reformer recognized there were those who opposed him. "*I maintain that there are many wicked knaves and spies here who listen to us and rejoice when scandal and disunity arise*"<sup>53</sup> was his observation. A lampoon of the Professor by an English student pictured him as a preacher who related old wives' tales in sermons and a man of little learning.

But students are students, and Luther was aware of their weaknesses. He saw through lame excuses to get off classes. One time when an epidemic was around, he wrote to the Elector and explained with transparent humor, "*I have observed that many of the young students have rejoiced over rumors of pestilence, for some of them have developed sores from carrying their schoolbags, some have acquired colic from their books, some have developed scabs on the fingers with which they write, some have picked up goutiness from their papers, and many have found their ink to be getting moldy.*"<sup>54</sup>

One might imagine that Luther's kindness made him a soft touch for the clever student. But he was too perceptive for that. When Hans von Auerswald, whose parents were footing the bill for his education, was not applying himself to his studies, Luther took him aside. "*I shall not hear of this,*" he told him, "*nor shall I suffer such an example of disobedience in my house and at my table, even if you possessed the wealth of a count. Pay heed to what I say, for I shall not stand for such conduct from you or from anybody else.*"<sup>55</sup>

When the Reformer heard that some students were consorting with prostitutes in the woods outside of town, he posted a warning: "*You foolish young gentlemen think that you must not suffer, that as soon as you feel ardent a whore must be found to satisfy you. ... The judgment of God stands: 'Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed (1 Corinthians 1:8).'*"<sup>56</sup>

Such parental concern on his part was coupled with positive guidance for the student's academic career and interest in the student's welfare. Luther recommended that students read a few books well rather than many cursorily. "*A student who does not wish to squander his efforts ought so to read and re-read some good author that the author enters into his flesh and blood. Reading many books will confuse rather than instruct*" was his observation.<sup>57</sup> When a promising student became needy, Luther helped to secure financial aid. He believed that often the poorest young men made the best students, because "*aristocratic fellows who carry heavy purses and provisions do not study.*"<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ewald M. Plass, *This is Luther* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1948) 303.

<sup>53</sup> *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* XXV [1928], Lutherana, 66.

<sup>54</sup> WABr 7, 207f, *Letter to John Frederick*, July 9, 1535.

<sup>55</sup> WATR 6, #7032 - 1539.

<sup>56</sup> WATR 4, # 4857n.

<sup>57</sup> WATR 3, # 2894a.

<sup>58</sup> WATR 3, # 3599 – 1537.

All this attention helped the Professor gain a good rapport with his students. Toward the end of his life, when Professor Luther entered his classroom, the students rose from their seats. Melanchthon had suggested the practice, but Luther modestly wished he had not. "*On account of this rising of the students, I have to pray more often,*" he confessed, "*and if I dared I would sometimes leave without lecturing. He who seeks honor will not attain it, or if he does, it brings great danger with it.*"<sup>59</sup>

For all his labors, as an educator, Luther took little special compensation. The Elector provided his home, the Black Cloister, which was deeded to him in 1532. His professor's salary was adequate for such a large household. He might have realized large profits from his writings. But he took not a penny royalty from them. The printers collected instead. Nor did he accept the usual honorarium or stipend that students were to pay their teachers. The Elector offered Luther a share in a rich silver mine, but he declined the offer. When the city magistrates offered him tax exemption, he insisted on paying taxes like anyone else.

He could have earned a mint on the Bible translation which secured him world fame. "*I have not taken a single coin for it,*" he made known, "*I have done it as a service to the dear Christians and to the honor of One who sits above, who blesses me so much every hour of my life that if I had translated a thousand times as much or as diligently, I still should not deserve to live a single hour.*"<sup>60</sup> Since his salary was sufficient, he did not want to preach for money. To his friend Wenceslaus Link, he confided the reasons: "*Money and goods I do not have and do not desire. If I formerly possessed a good name and honor, these possessions are now being very energetically ruined. Just one thing remains, my weak body, rendered dead tired by constant adversity. If they take that, according to God's will, by cunning or force, they will perhaps deprive me of an hour or two of my life. But I am satisfied with the possession of my sweet Redeemer and Propitiator, my Lord Jesus Christ, to whom I shall joyfully sing as long as I live.*"<sup>61</sup>

The Professor fulfilled that vow. He remained a dedicated teacher of the Gospel, not for personal gain or fame, but because he rejoiced in the tremendous work that another man, the Son of Man, had done for the world at the cost of his own life.

#### The dual role: Luther, as Educator

Wittenberg students did not only carry evangelical doctrine from the lecture halls of the University. They also spread Luther's views on education. At the opening of the sixteenth century, learning had fallen into contempt. The old scholastic ways were ridiculed by the Humanists as ossified. To open a new path, Luther issued his Education Manifesto in 1524 in a *Letter to the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools (1524)*. "We learn," said the author, "*that throughout all Germany the schools are declining, the universities becoming weak, and the cloisters are ruined. ... Now I beg all of my dear friends not to think of this matter so contemptuously as many do who do not see what the prince of this world intends. It is an earnest and great matter, deeply concerning Christ and the entire world, that we should help and counsel the young people.*"<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Johann Mathesius *Sermons on Luther's Life* (Stuttgart: Georg Buchwald, 1904), 176-177.

<sup>60</sup> LW 35, 193. *On Translating...An Open Letter* – 1530. WA 30, II, 632-646.

<sup>61</sup> Wilhelm Walther, *Für Luther wider Rom*, 1906, 50. Luther, *Letter to Wenceslas Linck*.

<sup>62</sup> LW 45, 348 + 350.

It is interesting to note Luther's approach to the problem of educational reform. He did not formulate systematically laws to govern learning or teaching. Nor did he write books on education or educational psychology in the technical sense. Nor did he wish to perpetuate an institution. His approach was more practical than theoretical.

To him the core of all learning is "*to know Christ and know him well.*"<sup>63</sup> He himself had come to know Christ as the one who frees us from all bondage so that we might truly love God and serve one another. His whole educational philosophy reflected this attitude. Already in the *Address to the Christian Nobility* he had counseled, "*Everyone not unceasingly busy with the Word of God must become corrupt.*"<sup>64</sup> Whatever educational directives we meet in Luther's writings, therefore, come from the depth of the Christian faith and out of his understanding of the needs of the people in their daily life.

The summary goal of education, as Luther saw it, was simply *love*, even as Christ had said love was the fulfilling of the Law. A liberal education in itself will not free us because it does not bring us the basic fear and love of God. "*True it is,*" Luther once observed, "*that human wisdom and the liberal arts are noble gifts of God. ...But we never can learn from them in detail what sin and righteousness are in the sight of God, how we can get rid of our sins, become godly and just before God, and come to life from death.*" For this reason "*the foremost and most general subject of study...should be the Holy Scriptures.*"<sup>65</sup>

Implicit in learning the fear and love of God is *service* to one's fellow man, for "*where the heart is right with God and this (the first) commandment is kept, fulfillment of all the others will follow of its own accord.*"<sup>66</sup> On this account, Luther gave the advice to parents, "*See to it that you above all have your children instructed in spiritual things, that you first give them to God; then to secular pursuits.*"<sup>67</sup>

Luther had learned from his study of Scripture that the key to education is faith or trust. In writing on the Apostles' Creed, he spoke of two ways of believing: "*The first (is) about God, that is, when I believe what is said concerning God is true. A faith of this kind is more knowledge or information than faith. The second way of believing is this, that I not only believe what is said about God to be true, but I put my trust in him, and dare to go ahead and deal with him. Such faith which ventures everything on what it has heard of God, be it in life or death, constitutes the Christian man, and it receives everything it desires from God. Such a faith cannot tolerate a false and wicked heart; it is a living faith, such as the First Commandment enjoins.*"<sup>68</sup> This living faith shows itself in the actions of daily life. For, Luther observed, "*a Christian lives in this temporal world, builds, buys and sells, deals with people, and does everything necessary for this world.*"<sup>69</sup>

Hand in hand with the foregoing aims of education was student development, growth of character and conscience. Luther was well aware of youth's penchant to ignore law and to be disobedient to those in authority. What was needed to counteract was training "*by studying,*

<sup>63</sup> Walch<sup>2</sup> 22, 5, #5.

<sup>64</sup> LW 44, 207. *Address to the German Nobility* - 1520.

<sup>65</sup> WA 48, 78.

<sup>66</sup> Concordia Triglott, *The Large Catechism, The First Commandment*, #47 (Minneapolis: The Mott Press, 1955 reprint) 593.

<sup>67</sup> Painter, *Luther on Education*, 120.

<sup>68</sup> Walch, 10, 198.

<sup>69</sup> Walch, 10, 178. *The Apostles Creed* - 1520. Quoted in Meuser/Schneider (eds), *Interpreting Luther's Legacy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969) 157-158.

*reading, meditating, and praying to be able in temptation to teach and comfort your own conscience as well as the conscience of others and to lead from the law back to grace, from active justice to passive justice.*"<sup>70</sup>

In so doing, the Christian will learn to thumb his nose at the law for the sake of Christ. "Say," Luther remarked with experienced insight, "O Law, you would climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, and there reign and reprove it of sin, and would take from me the joy of my heart, which I have by faith in Christ, and drive me to desperation, that I might be without all hope, and utterly perish. ...Trouble me not in these matters, for I will not suffer you, so intolerable a tyrant and cruel tormentor, to reign in my conscience, for it is the seat and temple of Christ the Son of God, who is the king of righteousness and peace, and my most sweet savior and mediator. He shall keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound and pure doctrine of the Gospel."<sup>71</sup>

The great challenge of educational reform brought with it a change in methodology. Formerly, instruction in vogue in elementary and secondary schools was stiff, formal, and un-pedagogical. Teachers read from the text, lectured and dictated, and pupils learned by rote.

At the university level, the laborious method of glossing the text prevailed. According to this method, the teacher gave a brief explanation of the text, the so-called *glossae* or marginal notes. These the students were supposed to copy at once in a notebook especially prepared for that purpose. After this bit-by-bit study, the instructor dictated his comments on a longer section of material that had been glossed. These *scholia* or summary interpretations were sometimes long, sometimes short. They highlighted passages that seemed important to the teacher. The commentary usually presented the text in a four-fold meaning: the literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical (that is, the text was interpreted literally, figuratively, morally, and mystically). Needless to say, this chopping-up method often left the students confused and bewildered.

As the meaning of the Gospel became clear to Luther his presentation also changed. Available student copies show drastic changes in methodology. The *glossae* and *scholia* were for the most part discarded. The four senses of Scripture were displaced by the literal and spiritual. The Christ-centered historical- grammatical-contextual method became the accepted practice in his class. As a result, the presentation hung together, flowed, and was clearer. The new Scripture insights, especially with regard to justification by faith, can be easily singled out. Luther interacted often with those who interpreted the sense of Scripture many ways.

Luther transferred his insights on methodology to the elementary level of education. His practical mind led him to get away from mechanical and uninteresting methods. "Good method in teaching," he remarked "should note differences in character of students."<sup>72</sup> The teacher must also become childlike to children.

On one occasion he taught the meaning of faith and love by using two little bags with pockets. Pupils were challenged to put pertinent passages into the fitting pocket. "Let no one think he is too wise, and disdain such child's play," he explained. "When Christ wished to teach men, he became a man. If we wish to teach children, we must become children. Would to God we had more of this

<sup>70</sup> LW 26, 11. *Lectures on Galatians* - 1525.

<sup>71</sup> LW 26, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Walch, 22, 1785.

*child's play. We should then see in a short time a great treasure of Christian people, souls rich in the Scriptures and in the knowledge of God.*"<sup>73</sup>

Such pleasurable teaching applied to all subjects. "*Since young people must run and jump or have something to do which they enjoy, ... why shouldn't that type of school be provided and such arts and skills be provided them? This is especially so since it is ordered by God's grace that children can learn with joy and play, whether it is language, other skills, or even history.*"<sup>74</sup>

In awakening the student's interest on the meaning of a subject, Luther understood the value of the question. The questions and answers of the Catechism were to serve such a purpose. To teach in this way, those who give the instruction should take care to keep the questions simple and to repeat both questions and answer in the same terms. "*For young and inexperienced people cannot be successfully instructed unless we adhere to the same text of same forms of expression,*" Luther wrote. "*They easily become confused when the teacher at one time employs a certain form of words and expressions, and at another, apparently with a view to make improvements, adopts a different form. The result of such a course will be that all the time and labor which we have expended will be lost.*"<sup>75</sup> In adhering to this advice has come the success of Luther's *Small Catechism*, as the "layman's Bible" in the Lutheran church.<sup>76</sup>

Change in methodology also signaled a change in the whole educational program. "*If I had children and could accomplish it,*" he said before his marriage, "*they should study not only the languages and history, but singing, instrumental music, and all the branches of mathematics.*"<sup>77</sup> The most comprehensive statement of Luther's views on curricula is found in the *Instructions to the Visitors of Parish Pastors*. Drawn up by Melancthon and endorsed by Luther, this work divides the graded schooling into three classes, according to ability divisions.<sup>78</sup>

Those in the beginners' division were to learn to read and to write and to sing music. They were expected to read a primer containing the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and prayers for various occasions. Two popular medieval textbooks selected for this level were a grammar by Donatus (*Ars Grammatica*) and a work by Cato.

The second ability division consisted of those who could read and were ready for a more in-depth study of language. In addition to the music hour in the morning, they were to advance their language study.<sup>79</sup> Religious instruction included Bible study, Catechism recitation, and learning passages from the Psalms.

In the third ability division, only the brightest who had learned their grammar well were included. They were taught music; Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero; composition; dialectic and rhetoric. By this time, they were expected to speak Latin as well as they could.

<sup>73</sup> LW 53, 66-67. *Preface to The German Mass and Order of Service* – 1526.

<sup>74</sup> LW 45, 169. *To the Councilmen of All Cities* - 1524. WA 15, 9, 27-53

<sup>75</sup> *Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 313. *Preface to The Small Catechism* - 1529.

<sup>76</sup> *Preface to The Small Catechism* – 1529, 474.

<sup>77</sup> LW 45, 369. *To the Councilmen of All Cities* - 1524.

<sup>78</sup> LW 40:314-320. *Instructions for the Visitors of Parish Pastors* - 1528.

<sup>79</sup> Texts in use were: Aesop's fables; two modern texts from Mosselanus (a grammar) and Erasmus (a collection of dialogues); and two classical authors, Terence, the play-writer, and Plautus, author/translator of stories.



At another time, Luther suggested a work-study program for those who would learn a trade. *"My idea is to let boys attend ... school for one or two hours a day and devote the rest of the time to working at home, learning a trade or doing whatever their parents desired, so that study and work might go hand in hand while they are young and able to do both."*<sup>80</sup> To this he added that *"a girl can surely find time enough to go to school one hour a day and still attend to all at home."*<sup>81</sup>

In this connection we must recall that Luther pioneered in advocating schools for girls. In his early manifesto to the *Christian Nobility of the German Nation* that outlined the need for extensive reforms, Luther expressed the wish: *"Would to God that every town had a girl's school as well, where the girls would be taught the gospel."*<sup>82</sup> Later in seeking support from the City Councilmen of Germany, he reiterated the broad-based need for universal public education for everyone, girls and boys alike, to benefit society: *"Only one thing is lacking,"* he stated flatly, *"the earnest desire to train the young and to benefit and serve the world with able men and women."*<sup>83</sup>

Luther himself followed suit. In 1527, two years after his marriage and a year after the birth of the first of his six children, he invited Else von Kanitz to open a school for girls in Wittenberg and offered her room and board in his own home.<sup>84</sup> Of the persons who came to serve the city of Wittenberg, in addition to the pastor, there were a teacher for the Latin school and three assistants, a teacher for the girl's school and an assistant.<sup>85</sup>

Surveying Luther's curricula suggestions, we find he advocated a broad curriculum of studies for all schools, from primary through university. The humanistic/liberal arts approach to learning was incorporated into schools founded in the emerging Lutheran church. Probably the best examples were the Wittenberg Latin School founded in 1533, as well as the Wittenberg Girls' School started the same year. From 1533-1536 the University of Wittenberg itself received a new set of statutes to make it the first University to carry through a curricular reform along Luther's lines.

In all training the study of language arts was basic. To learn grammar was necessary, according to Luther, because *"knowledge is of two kinds."* One, it teaches *"what words are called and what they mean."* Another, it shows *"what the subject matter is. But when knowledge of the subject matter is lacking, then knowledge of words is useless."*<sup>86</sup> Thus grammatical study is best conducted in the context of its subject matter.

At the same time there should be a continued study of logic and rhetoric. By learning them, *"people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth."*<sup>87</sup> When both are taken captive by the spirit of the Gospel, they are helpful in communicating the Word of God. *"Logic teaches,"* he observed, *"and rhetoric moves and persuades. The former appeals to the understanding; the latter to the will."*<sup>88</sup> As an example, *"Dialectic (logic) says 'Give me something to eat.' Rhetoric says, 'I*

<sup>80</sup> LW 45,370. *To the Councilmen of All Cities* - 1524.

<sup>81</sup> LW 45,370. *To the Councilmen of All Cities* - 1524.

<sup>82</sup> LW 44, 206. *To the Christian Nobility ...Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate* - 1520.

<sup>83</sup> LW 45, 370-371. *To the Councilmen of All Cities...That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools* - 1524. Between 1524-26 reforms were enacted in a number of cities, including Magdeburg, Eisleben, and Nürnberg.

<sup>84</sup> WABr 4, 236. *Letter to Elsa von Kanitz* - August 22, 1527.

<sup>85</sup> E. Sehling, *Die evangelischen Kirchenordnungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1979 reprint) Vol. I, 700ff.

<sup>86</sup> LW 3, 67.

<sup>87</sup> Smith/Jacobs, *Luther's Correspondence II*, 176f, *Letter to Eoban Hess* – March 20, 1523.

<sup>88</sup> WATR 2, # 2199A.

*have had a hard road to go all day long, am tired, sick, hungry, etc., and have eaten nothing; dear fellow, give me a good piece of meat, a good fried chicken, and a good measure of beer to drink.”*<sup>89</sup> Yet, all in all, simple language is best. *“One should accustom himself to good, honest, intelligible words.”*<sup>90</sup>

Luther knew from experience that the art of writing is neither simple nor easy. *“Ask a preacher or speaker whether writing and speaking is work! Ask a schoolmaster! ...The pen is light,”* he observes, *“There is no tool of any of the trades that is easier to get than the writer’s tool. ... But in writing, the best part of the body (which is the head) and the noblest of the members (which is the tongue) and the highest faculty (which is speech) must lay hold and work as never before. ...They say of writing that ‘it only takes three fingers to do it’; but the whole body and soul work at it too.”*<sup>91</sup>

The good Doctor was great in his praise of history. To him *“historians are the most useful people and most excellent teachers, whom we can never sufficiently honor, praise, and thank.”* It requires *“a superior man to write history,”* he felt, *“a man with a lion-heart, who dares without fear to speak the truth.”*<sup>92</sup> The reason for such high praise for true historians was *“history describes nothing else than the ways of God, that is, grace and anger, which we should believe as if they stood in Scripture.”*<sup>93</sup>

The study of history, therefore, was not only to be a source of illustration for life, but above all a picture of God's wonderful dealings with men and a leading source of human knowledge. *“When one thoroughly considers the matter, it is from history, as from a living fountain, that have flowed all laws, sciences, counsel, warning, threatenings, comfort, strength, instruction, foresight, knowledge, wisdom, and all virtues; that is to say, history is nothing else than an indication, recollection, and monument of divine works and judgments, showing how God maintains, governs, hinders, advances, punishes, and honors people, according as each one has deserved good and evil. And although there are many who do not recognize and regard God, they must take warning from history.”*<sup>94</sup> In short, history is life, or a slice of life. In it God acts, often contrary to all reason. Therefore all should learn from it.

The place of music in the curriculum was retained and expanded. To the musician, Lewis Senfl, in Munich, he wrote, *“I really believe nor am I ashamed to assert that next to theology there is no art equal to music for it is the only one, except theology, which can give a quiet and happy mind. ...This is the reason why the prophets practiced no other art, neither geometry nor arithmetic nor astronomy, as if they believed music and divinity nearly allied.”*<sup>95</sup> Not surprisingly, Luther urged using cantors in all Lutheran schools and encouraged princes and city councils to secure outstanding organists for their churches. His own efforts in hymnody are well known. *“It is right that we retain*

<sup>89</sup> WATR 2, # 1698.

<sup>90</sup> WATR 4, # 4612.

<sup>91</sup> LW 46, 249. *Sermon on Keeping Children in School.*

<sup>92</sup> LW 34, 276-277. *Preface to Galeatius Cappella’s History* – 1538. WA 50, 383-385.

<sup>93</sup> LW 34, 276-277. *“Actually the demand that history be represented at the universities stems from Luther, who made this demand as early as the year 1520 (WA 6, 458, 34),”* according to Elert, Werner, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962) 483, footnote 9.

<sup>94</sup> LW 34, 275-276.

<sup>95</sup> LW 49, 428. *Letter to Louis Senfl* - October 12, 1530.

music in the schools," Luther commented. *"The young are to be continually exercised in this art; it makes good and skillful people of them."*<sup>96</sup>

Most unusual for his day and age was Luther's praise of natural science. He always stood in awe of God's wonders in nature and observed them closely. *"God-fearing people,"* he stated, *"look upon birds and flowers filled with wonder and learn from both to say 'If God does such fine things for his creatures, will he not clothe and feed me?'"*<sup>97</sup> After a fishing expedition with Katie, Luther rejoiced in the catch and said, *"Any a skinflint sits the midst of the greatest luxuries and yet can't enjoy them with pleasure. It's said that the ungodly won't see the glory of God; in fact, they can't even recognize present gifts because God overwhelms us so much with them."*<sup>98</sup>

*"...See how well a little fish multiplies, for one produces probably a thousand. ...Consider the birds, how chastely their reproduction takes place! The rooster pecks the hen's head, the hen lays a little egg nicely in the nest, sits on it, and soon the young chick peeps out. Look how the little chick is hidden in the egg! If we had never seen such an egg and one were brought from Shangri-La, we'd be startled and amazed. And all the philosophers couldn't offer an explanation for these creatures. Only Moses gives an explanation: 'God said,' and it was so."*<sup>99</sup> With such simple faith he rejoiced in the study of nature.

*"We are at the dawn of a new era,"* he stated, paraphrasing Romans 1:10, *"for we are beginning to recover the knowledge of the external world that we lost through the fall of Adam. We now observe creatures properly. ...[and] recognize in the most delicate flower the wonders of divine goodness and omnipotence."*<sup>100</sup>

To foster scholarship, Luther advocated the growth of libraries. *"No effort or expense should be spared to found good libraries,"* he advised in a letter *To the Councilmen*, *"especially in the larger cities, which can well afford it."*<sup>101</sup> The carefully selected acquisitions to these libraries should include Biblical books and commentaries written in the original of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, German and other languages; books from heathen and Christian authors; works on the arts and sciences, medicine and law, and chronicles and histories of all kinds.

But Luther also saw the need for body-care and recreation, for student and teacher alike. After the trying meeting at Augsburg where the Lutheran Confession was presented, Melanchthon was so engrossed in thought that he was writing even during the meal. Luther wrote to him and, as it were, took his pen away from him, with the advice, *"God can be honored not alone by work but also by rest and recreation."*<sup>102</sup> He did not forget the lesson himself and often advocated bodily exercises to the students. Students frequently played ball in the square in front of the castle gate, engaged in fencing, and went swimming in the Elbe. *"It was well considered by the ancients,"* he related, *"that the people should practice gymnastics. ...These two exercises and pastimes please me best, namely, music and gymnastics."*<sup>103</sup>

<sup>96</sup> WATR 1, # 968.

<sup>97</sup> WA 29, 544.

<sup>98</sup> LW 54, 199f, # 3390b (1533). WATR 3, # 3390b.

<sup>99</sup> LW 54, 199f, # 3390b (1533). WATR 3, # 3390b. .

<sup>100</sup> Painter, 163. Also, Lewis Spitz, *Renaissance and Reformation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1980) Vol. II, 582.

<sup>101</sup> LW 45, 373. *To the Councilmen of All Cities* - 1524.

<sup>102</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 254. *Letter to Melanchthon* - May 12, 1530.

<sup>103</sup> LW 54, 206, # 3470 - October 27, 1536. The ancient Latin saying, *"Mens sana in corpora sano"* originally from the Greek Philosopher Thales, is popularly derived from the Roman poet Juvenal's *Satire X*.

In addition to sports, Luther also felt that dramatics and dancing were worthy extra-curricular activities. When asked whether secular drama was proper for a Christian audience, Luther replied that such plays would be of great educational value to actors and audience alike. *"They are a mirror of life"* he maintained. *"Nor ought Christians to be held to avoid them because at times coarse jokes and objectionable love affairs are found in them. If a man insists upon taking offense, even the Holy Bible gives him occasion to do so,"* he reasoned.<sup>104</sup>

The University co-curricular statutes permitted the students to attend dances on occasion "for the sake of honest discipline" and because they could learn "reverence and modesty in conversation and deportment." The reasons given already suggest the nature of the dances. "We shall severely punish those who foolishly cause disturbance at such gatherings," the statutes continued, "and especially those who are immodest in their dancing and lead girls in gyrations beyond the common harmony of modest dancing."<sup>105</sup>

During his term as rector at the University, Melancthon posted a notice on indecency in dance, and concluded with a summary intent of the Christian school: "We ask you to remember that a school is a laboratory of virtues and in a Christian school we ought to especially excel in piety, lest evil examples give the teaching of religion a bad report."<sup>106</sup> It was his concern, as it was Luther's, not to add a stumbling block for others to what was already the offense of the cross. The plea was for decency.

### Conclusion

We have come a long way in our visit with Luther as educator at home and in school. In our own way we may have sympathy with Katherine, who once said after her husband's death, "Our dear Lord God has taken this dear and precious man from me, and not just from me only, but from the whole world."<sup>107</sup>

Luther himself would be uncomfortable with such honor. *"What is Luther?"* he once said of himself. *"The doctrine is not mine. I have not been crucified for anybody. ...I am nobody's master and do not want to be. I, and with me the whole church, possess the only doctrine of Christ who alone is our Master."*<sup>108</sup> It is for this very attitude that we have come to honor Martin Luther, pioneer educator, reformer, and experienced mentor in the discipline of education.

"Let each his lesson learn with care  
And all the household well shall fare. " <sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Karl A.H., Burkhardt *Luther's Briefwechsel*. (Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1866),424.

<sup>105</sup> CR 10, 993. See also WA 32, 209, Sermon (??1530).

<sup>106</sup> CR 10, 79-81.

<sup>107</sup> Smith, *Letters*, 424. See also Ernst Kroker, *Katherina von Bora, Martin Luther Frau*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Zwickau: J. Hermann, 1925) 223-224. English unpublished manuscript: Mark DeGarmeaux, *Katherine von Bora: Martin Luther's Wife* (2005), 187 (used with permission).

<sup>108</sup> LW 45, 70-71. *A Sincere Admonition by Martin Luther to All Christians to Guard Against Insurrection and Rebellion* December 1521; WA 8, 68.

<sup>109</sup> *Concordia, the Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Preface to *The Small Catechism* - 1529, 348 See also the standard critical edition of the Lutheran Confessional Writings: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vondenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1950), 527. Also, see the German-Latin-English edition: the *Concordia Triglotta* (Minneapolis: The Mott Press, 1917) 563.

- CR — Corpus Reformatorum, Bretschneider K.G (ed), Halle,1834.  
LW — Luther's Works, American Edition, Concordia Publishing House & Fortress Press.  
WA — Weimarer Ausgabe, The Weimar Edition, the standard, critical edition of Luther's Works.  
WABr — Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe, Luther's Letters, in the Weimar Edition.  
WATR — Weimarer Ausgabe Tischreden, Luther's Table Talk, in the Weimar Edition.

**NOTE**

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On the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, 1517-2017, this essay is dedicated to:

*WELS' SYNODICAL MINISTERIAL TRAINING SCHOOLS IN THEIR VITAL MISSION OF PREPARING FUTURE CALLED WORKERS TO CARRY OUT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATING PEOPLE IN CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS IN GOD'S WORD AT HOME AND ABROAD FOR THE FUTURE OF GOD' KINGDOM. IN OUR CHRISTIAN TEACHING, GOD'S WORD IS OUR GREAT HERITAGE AND CONFESSION. VERBUM DEI MANET IN AETERNUM.*